MAIN STREAM NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Water Security Planning Act: Observations and Considerations Report

November 2024

brendle GROUP

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Acknowledgements

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- Highlands University
- Isabel Castillo Performing Arts and Event Center
- Beatrice V. Q. Martinez Senior Center
- City of Santa Fe Market Station
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- City of Hobbs
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Introduction

The Water Security Planning Act (WSPA) is New Mexico's guiding legislation for regional water planning and management to secure a resilient water future. It creates a roadmap for regionalized water planning and implementation that prioritizes the unique needs of local communities, makes use of the best available science and data, and maintains compliance with federal and state laws.

Robust engagement is an essential feature of the WSPA. To inform rulemaking and the creation of guidelines, an extensive series of community open houses and an online survey were conducted by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC) during the Spring and Summer of 2024. The in-person and online engagement process was supported by consultants at Brendle Group and MediaDesk. Brendle Group then developed two reports to summarize the engagement results, observations, and interpretations:

- **Engagement Report:** The engagement report provides a compendium of engagement results and themes.
- **Observations and Considerations Report:** This report provides observations and interpretation of the results of the engagement process. It offers preliminary considerations to inform rulemaking and the development of the guidelines for regional water planning.

The primary audience for these reports is the NMISC Planning Team who will use them to guide the drafting of WSPA rule and guideline language ahead of a formal review, rule promulgation, and guideline adoption process in 2025. The reports also provide accountability and evidence to all those who provided input during the engagement process, documenting how input was interpreted and incorporated into the development of rulemaking and guidelines.

A summary of the engagement process and an overview of this Observations and Considerations Report are provided in the following sections.

Engagement Summary

The 2024 engagement process was led by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission's (NMISC) planning team. Consultants from Media Desk and Brendle Group provided technical expertise and additional capacity to support NMISC with the statewide public engagement effort. The engagement process included one open house held in each of New Mexico's 16 water regions from the previous rounds of planning. To expand participation beyond the in-person open houses, an online open house was provided on the Main Stream New Mexico website.

The questions asked of participants in the in-person and online formats are provided in Table 1. See Figure 1 for summary facts and highlights of the engagement process. See Figure 2 for a graphic illustrating the open house experience.

In total, more than 710 people attended open houses in-person and another 1,600 completed the online survey. Together, these efforts garnered more than 25,000 unique responses (i.e., dots placed, comments written, survey questions completed) to inform WSPA rule and guideline development.

The companion Engagement Report, which provides a detailed summary of engagement activities and results, is available at https://mainstreamnm.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NMISC-Regional-Water-Planning-Engagement-Summary-FINAL.pdf.

Table 1. Engagement Questions by Engagement Forum

Question	In-Person Open House Station	Online Open House Survey
What is your ZIP code?	Welcome	Survey 1
Q1: Have you been involved with state-led regional water planning before?	Welcome	Survey 2
Q2: What is most important to you when you think about planning for New Mexico's water future?	Welcome	Survey 3
Q3: What is the biggest water challenge facing you and your neighbors? What are the biggest opportunities?	Why	Survey 3
Q4: In the next 50 years, New Mexico is expected to have at least 25% less water in rivers and a similar reduction in groundwater recharge. As water becomes more scarce, what are you most concerned about?	Why	Survey 3
Q5: What do you think is most important to achieve by revising the regional water planning process?	Why	Survey 4
Q6: What communities do you consider to be part of your region?	Where	Survey 4
Q7: What do you think is most important in terms of how boundaries are delineated?	Where	Survey 4
Q8: Which of the example boundary concept maps resonates with you most?	Where	Survey 4
Q9: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining how to delineate future regional water planning boundaries?	Where	Survey 4
Q10: What are the qualities that you would like to have in a planning process?	Who	Survey 5
Q11: What characteristics should future planning entity members have?	Who	Survey 5
Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?	Who	Survey 5
Q13: Is the current requirement for a minimum of two general public meetings during each planning cycle sufficient?	Who	Survey 5

Question	In-Person Open House Station	Online Open House Survey
Q14: In what other ways should New Mexicans be engaged in the water planning process?	Who	Survey 5
Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?	Who	Survey 5
Q16: What key questions should each regional plan answer?	What	Survey 6
Q17: What types of implementation strategies should be included in regional water plans to create a balanced water future?	What	Survey 6
Q18: What key information would you like to know about the water projects, programs, and policies happening in your region?	What	Survey 6
Q19: What information is most important to track in the regional water planning process?	What	Survey 6
Q20: To help us better understand your perspective on public welfare, please express how strong you agree or disagree.	n/a	Survey 7
Q21: Do you have additional comments on public welfare that you would like NMISC to consider?	n/a	Survey 7
Q22: Who should be eligible to apply for grants or loans for planning activities?	n/a	Survey 7
Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grants or loans for planning activities	n/a	Survey 7
Q24: Are there other factors NMISC should consider when thinking about funding water planning activities?	n/a	Survey 7
Q25: A guidance related to state agency collaboration should consider…	n/a	Survey 7
Q26: Which of the listed ways should the NMISC prioritize when supporting the implementation of regional water plans	n/a	Survey 8
Q27: How frequently should future regional water planning entities be required to update their regional water security plans? Note, NMISC anticipates a two-year planning cycle needed to update any regional water security plan.	n/a	Survey 8
Q28: Regional water security plans are required to have prioritized projects, programs, and policies. The prioritization of these by region should be accomplished by:	n/a	Survey 8
Q29: Any other suggestions for how regions will prioritize plan recommendations?	n/a	Survey 8
Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?	n/a	Survey 8
Q31: Please provide any other highlights, thoughts, questions, suggestions, criticisms or things we might have missed in this questionnaire related to regional water planning in New Mexico.	Thank You/Exit	Survey 9

Figure 1. Summary of Main Stream New Mexico Campaign Opportunities and Outcomes

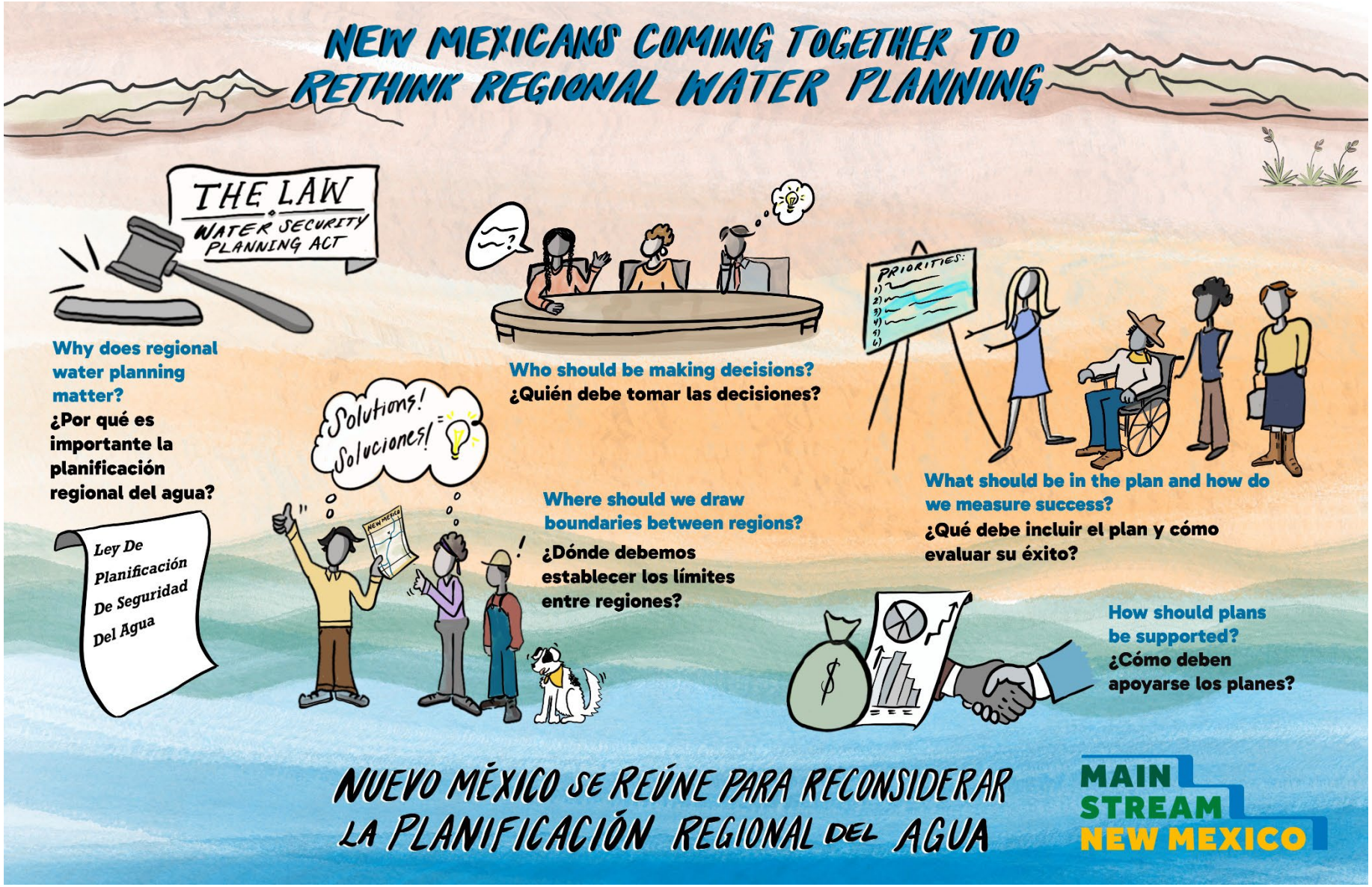


Figure 2. Graphic Summary of the Open House Experience

Report Overview

The Water Security Planning Act (WSPA) outlines essential rules and guidelines that will govern the regional water planning process across New Mexico. These topics for rules and guidelines, listed in Table 2, form the framework by which regional water security plans will be developed and implemented. Each rule and guideline will be designed to address the diverse water management challenges faced by New Mexico's regions while ensuring alignment with statewide water security objectives.

Table 2. Rules and Guidelines to be Established per Water Security Planning Act

Rule and Guideline Topic Areas
Rule 1. The boundaries and number of water planning regions in the state
Rule 2. The criteria for commission approval of a regional water security plan with prioritized projects, programs and policies
Rule 3. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to develop and provide notice to the commission of issues and concerns relating to the public welfare of the water planning region
Rule 4. The composition of a regional water planning entity
Rule 5. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans
Guideline 1. The identification of regional stakeholders and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration
Guideline 2. The public input requirements for regional water planning
Guideline 3. The requirements for a proposal for grants or loans for planning activities
Guideline 4. The process for approval of grants or loans
Guideline 5. The process for state agency collaboration
Guideline 6. The metrics for reporting on regional water projects and, programs and policies
Guideline 7. The procedures to support implementation of a regional water security plan
Guideline 8. The schedule for implementation of regional water planning, including integration with statewide objectives

To inform the development of these rules and guidelines, a robust public engagement process was conducted. The questions posed to participants during this engagement process were carefully mapped to the rule and guideline topic areas (as shown in Table 3).

This report is structured to present considerations by rule and guideline, incorporating feedback from the engagement process, which included both in-person open house events and an online engagement survey. Each section of the report includes:

1. **Key considerations by rule/guideline**: A detailed explanation of the key considerations developed for each rule and guideline, reflecting both public input and technical considerations.
2. **Additional observations**: These sections highlight additional observations that arose from the public engagement process, as well as reflections from the consulting and NMISC teams.
3. **Basis for considerations**: These sections provide analysis of how public input, gathered through the engagement process, directly informed the considerations. Each engagement

question was designed to gather feedback on specific aspects of water planning, such as future water needs, regional boundaries, and public involvement. Quotes from open house and survey participants are also included throughout the report.

Table 3. List of Engagement Questions used to Inform Each Rule and Guideline

Rule or Guideline	Related Engagement Questions
Rule 1. The boundaries and number of water planning regions in the state	• Q2: What is most important to you when you think about planning for New Mexico's water future? • Q3: What is the biggest water challenge facing you and your neighbors? What are the biggest opportunities? • Q4: In the next 50 years, New Mexico is expected to have at least 25% less water in rivers and a similar reduction in groundwater recharge. As water becomes more scarce, what are you most concerned about? • Q5: What do you think is most important to achieve by revising the regional water planning process? • Q6: What communities do you consider to be part of your region? • Q7: What do you think is most important in terms of how boundaries are delineated? • Q8: Which of the example boundary concept maps resonates with you most? • Q9: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining how to delineate future regional water planning boundaries?
Rule 2. The criteria for commission approval of a regional water security plan with prioritized projects, programs and policies	• Q2: What is most important to you when you think about planning for New Mexico's water future? • Q16: What key questions should each regional plan answer? • Q28: Regional water security plans are required to have prioritized projects, programs, and policies. The prioritization of these by region should be accomplished by
Rule 3. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to develop and provide notice to the commission of issues and concerns relating to the public welfare of the water planning region	• Q20: To help us better understand your perspective on public welfare, please express how strong you agree or disagree. • Q21: Do you have additional comments on public welfare that you would like NMISC to consider?
Rule 4. The composition of a regional water planning entity	• Q10: What are the qualities that you would like to have in a planning process? • Q11: What characteristics should future planning entity members have? • Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role? • Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?
Rule 5. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans	• Q20: To help us better understand your perspective on public welfare, please express how strong you agree or disagree. • Q21: Do you have additional comments on public welfare that you would like NMISC to consider?
Guideline 1. The identification of regional stakeholders and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration	• Q10: What are the qualities that you would like to have in a planning process? • Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?

Rule or Guideline	Related Engagement Questions
	• Q14: In what other ways should New Mexicans be engaged in the water planning process? • Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function? • Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?
Guideline 2. The public input requirements for regional water planning	• Q1: Have you been involved with state-led regional water planning before? • Q13: Is the current requirement for a minimum of two general public meetings during each planning cycle sufficient? • Q14: In what other ways should New Mexicans be engaged in the water planning process? • Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?
Guideline 3. The requirements for a proposal for grants or loans for planning activities	• Q22: Who should be eligible to apply for grants or loans for planning activities? • Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grant or loans for planning activities. • Q24: Are there other factors NMISC should consider when thinking about funding water planning activities?
Guideline 4. The process for approval of grants or loans	• Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grants or loans for planning activities • Q24: Are there other factors NMISC should consider when thinking about funding water planning activities?
Guideline 5. The process for state agency collaboration	• Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role? • Q25: A guidance related to state agency collaboration should consider…
Guideline 6. The metrics for reporting on regional water projects and, programs and policies	• Q16: What key questions should each regional plan answer? • Q18: What key information would you like to know about the water projects, programs, and policies happening in your region? • Q19: What information is most important to track in the regional water planning process? • Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grants and loans for planning activities. • Q28: Regional water security plans are required to have prioritized projects, programs, and policies. The prioritization of these by region should be accomplished by: • Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?
Guideline 7. The procedures to support implementation of a regional water security plan	• Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role? • Q26: Which of the listed ways should the NMISC prioritize when supporting the implementation of regional water plans • Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?
Guideline 8. The schedule for implementation of regional water planning, including integration with statewide objectives	• Q27: How frequently should future regional water planning entities be required to update their regional water security plans? Note, NMISC anticipates a two-year planning cycle needed to update any regional water security plan. • Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?

Considerations for Rule and Guideline Development

This section provides considerations and observations for the creation of a ruleset and guidelines related to regional water planning in New Mexico.

Rule Development

The WSPA outlines five components for rulemaking related to regional water planning. While the structure and content of rulemaking will be determined through the formal review and promulgation process, this report outlines key considerations for each of the components identified in the WSPA:

1. The boundaries and number of water planning regions in the state.
2. The criteria for commission approval of a regional water security plan with prioritized projects, programs, and policies.
3. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to develop and provide notice to the commission of issues and concerns relating to the public welfare of the water planning region.
4. The composition of a regional water planning entity.
5. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans.

1. The boundaries and number of water planning regions in the state

Local demographics, water sources, governing boundaries, and ecology vary significantly across New Mexico. This is where regional water planning comes into play. Water planning at the regional scale allows communities to answer key questions like:

- How much water is currently available?
- How much water is required to meet existing and planned needs?
- How will balance be maintained between need and water availability?
- What's needed to develop and implement effective water solutions?

The previous planning process had 16 water planning regions in New Mexico. These regions were established using a combination of hydrologic and institutional boundaries. The WSPA engagement process re-examined the water planning regions, including how the boundaries for the regions should be established. Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for creating regional water planning boundaries include:

- Using hydrology (e.g., where water is found above ground, where water is found below ground) as the primary basis for boundary-making.
- Coordinating boundaries with the availability of water data and water rights administration to the greatest extent possible.

- Avoiding the fracture of existing water compact areas and settlements to the greatest extent possible.
- Coordinating the number of regions with the staffing approach so that each region is adequately supported.

Key Considerations for Boundary Mapping

The engagement process included interactive maps (in-person and online) for participants to explore various geographic features that could inform boundary creation. Maps included:

- Groundwater Basins
- New Mexico Counties
- New Mexico House and Senate Districts
- New Mexico Municipalities
- Public Water Systems, Acequia Communities, and Irrigation Districts
- Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Water Compacts
- Water Planning Boundaries from the previous round of planning
- Watersheds and Surface Water Features

In addition to these interactive maps, three boundary concepts were presented for feedback:

- Councils of Government
- Hydrology-Based Regions
- Water Rights District Offices

These maps were used by participants to inform their responses to Questions 6 through 9.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, hydrologic characteristics appear to have the most support to serve as the primary basis for boundary-making. A hydrological approach to delineating water planning regions also aligns with how several other Western states delineate regional water planning boundaries, including Utah, Colorado, and California.

Other factors, such as ensuring adequate staffing and resources, were elevated in various parts of the state. To highlight some of these considerations by area, overviews of the similarities, differences, and key observations from the engagement process are included for four geographical quadrants of the state: Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast. These four geographical quadrants align with data included in the 2015 New Mexico Water Use by Categories (Figure 3), which was included at the open houses within the welcome packet all participants received (Figure 4). **The quadrants are not proposed boundaries** but rather, are used to inform an understanding of geographical differences across New Mexico.

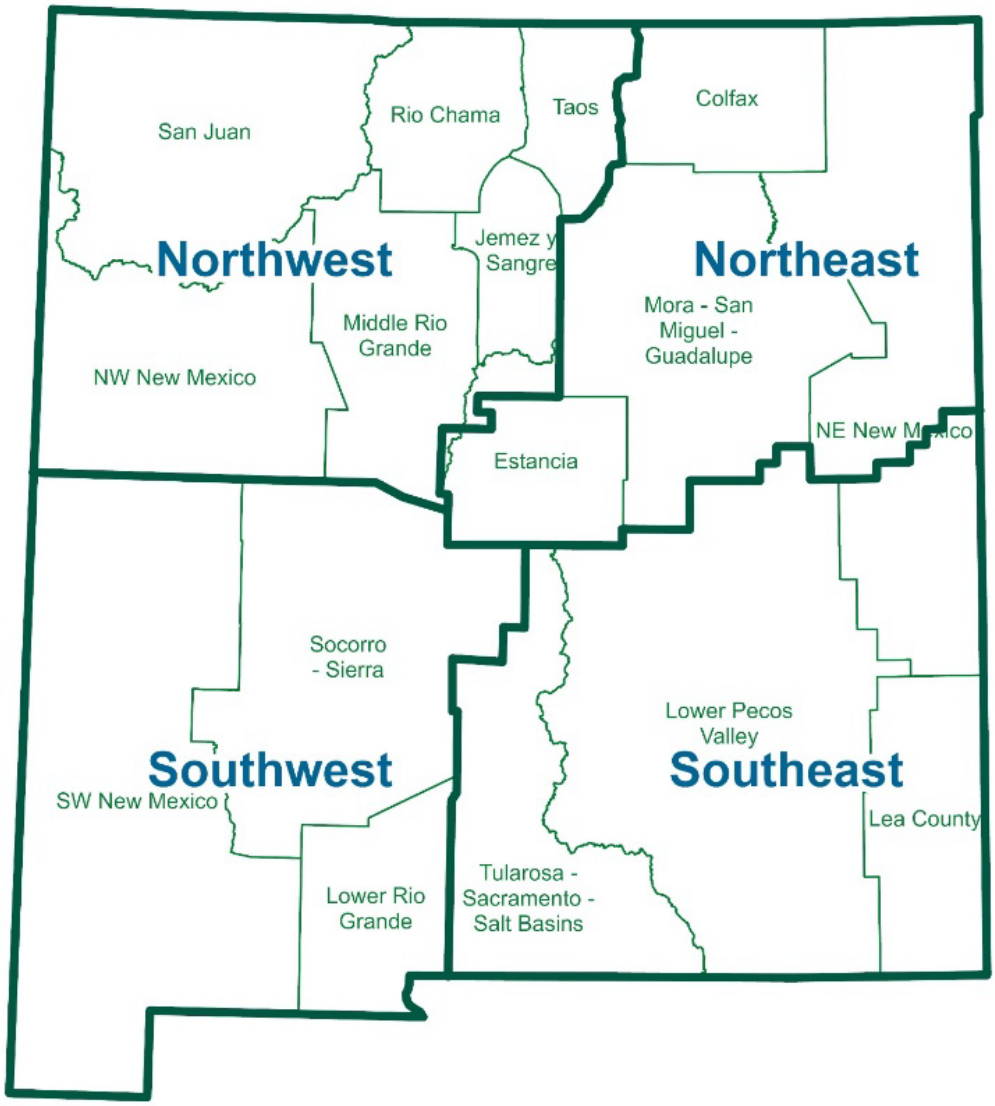
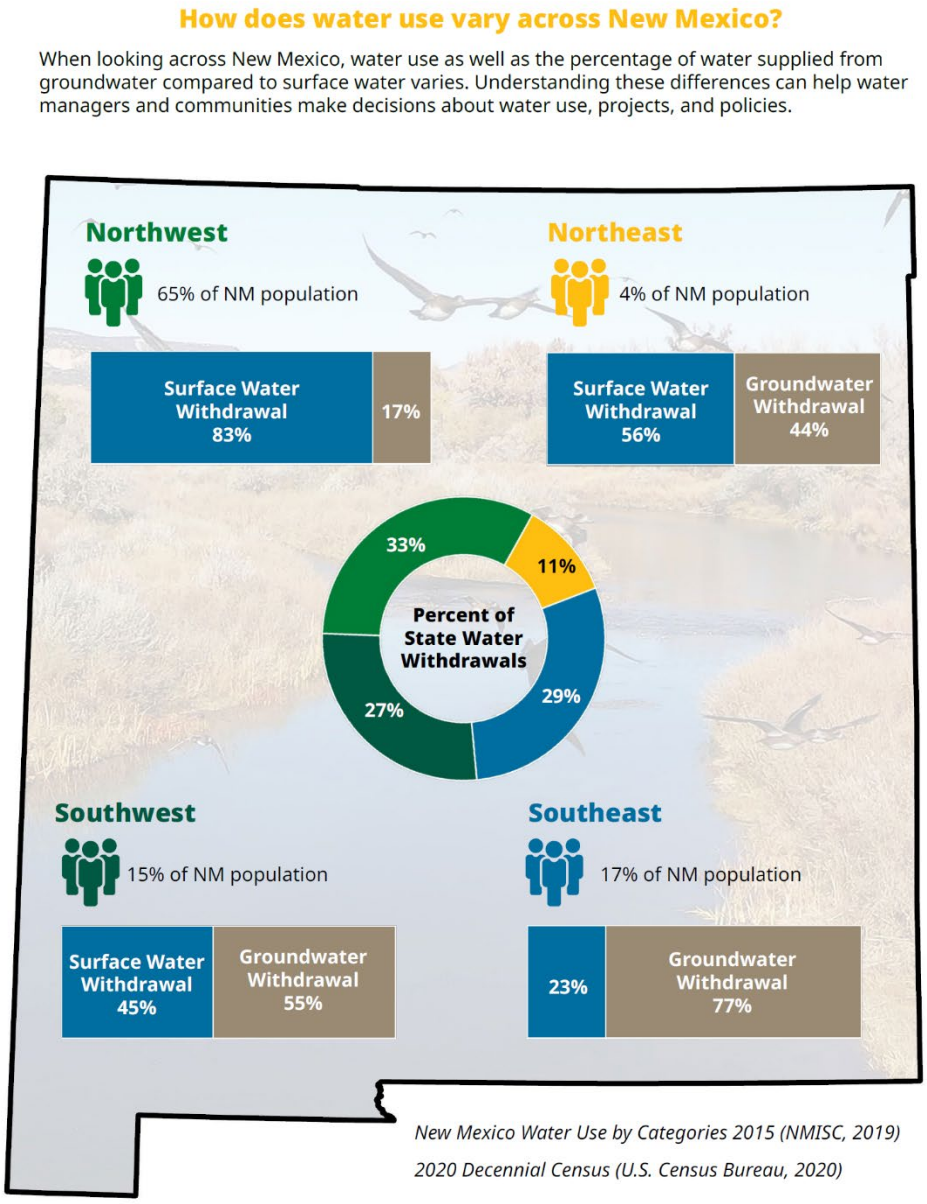


Figure 3. Four Geographical Regions as Outlined in the 2015 New Mexico Water Use by Categories Study



Diving deeper into who uses water in each area of the state, for all areas agriculture is the largest water user. Other sectors vary by quadrant, with water lost to evaporation having the most variability depending on the quadrant.

	Irrigated Agriculture	Public Water Supply	Self-Supplied Domestic	Livestock	Industrial, Commercial, Mining, and Power	Evaporation
Northwest	68%	16%	2%	0%	8%	6%
Northeast	79%	3%	0%	1%	2%	14%
Southwest	79%	6%	0%	1%	4%	11%
Southeast	82%	7%	1%	3%	4%	3%
Statewide	**76%**	**9%**	**1%**	**1%**	**5%**	**7%**

Figure 4. Geographical Region Information Summarized for Open House Welcome Packet

Northwest NM Quadrant

This portion of the state includes the following former regions (fully or partially):

- San Juan
- NW New Mexico
- Rio Chama
- Middle Rio Grande
- Taos
- Jemez y Sangre

This quadrant represents 65% of New Mexico's population, including Albuquerque, and has the highest percentage of public water supply use in the state, accounting for 16% of total use. This quadrant also has the lowest percentage of water used for agriculture, at 68%. The northwest of the quadrant of the state is primarily served by surface water. Administratively, this region also includes six interstate compacts (i.e. Colorado River, Upper Colorado River, La Plata, Rio Grande, Costilla, and Animas-La Plata compacts). This area also has a high percentage of pueblos, tribes, and nations.

Common responses and potential consideration for boundary mapping in this quadrant of the state include:

- Where possible, align boundaries with water compact areas.
- Where possible, align with existing administrative boundaries where entities are active in water planning efforts (e.g., NWCOG, San Juan River Commission).
- Avoid dividing culturally and historically significant areas such as pueblo and tribal lands, existing and historical acequia areas, and community driven irrigation districts.
- Concerns about grouping rural areas with large population centers.
- Consider creating a sub-region for planning for the Albuquerque metro area as distinct from the rest of the region and the state.
- Group areas primarily served by acequias together.

Northeast NM Quadrant

This portion of the state includes the following former regions (fully or partially):

- NE New Mexico
- San Miguel-Mora-Guadalupe
- Colfax
- Estancia

The Northeast of New Mexico is the least populated quadrant of the state, with only 4% of the total population. The water supply to this quadrant is split between groundwater and surface water. The predominant water use in this quadrant of the state is irrigated agriculture. Administratively, this area also includes two interstate compacts (i.e., Canadian and Pecos compacts).

Common responses for boundary mapping in this quadrant of the state include:

- Concerns about grouping rural areas with large population centers.
- Differentiation between areas served by groundwater, on the edge of the Ogallala Aquifer, and more surface water dependent areas.
- Group areas primarily served by acequias together.
- Group areas with common water uses together (e.g., predominantly agricultural uses).

Southwest NM Quadrant

This quadrant of the state includes the following former regions (fully or partially):

- SW New Mexico
- Socorro-Sierra
- Lower Rio Grande

The Southwest quadrant of the state accounts for 15% of New Mexico's population and is served by both surface water and groundwater. The predominant water use in this quadrant of the state is irrigated agriculture. Administratively, this quadrant includes the Rio Grande Basin, the Mimbres Basin, and the Lower Colorado Basin, which in New Mexico consists of Gila, San Francisco, and San Simon Rivers. The Rio Grande Compact applies to the Rio Grande Basin portion of the quadrant.

Common responses and potential consideration for boundary mapping in this area of the state include:

- Maintaining previous regional boundaries where aligned with the Arizona Settlements Act (SW New Mexico).
- Including the Socorro area in the Middle Rio Grande region, as it is part of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and to facilitate staffing and funding for this area.
- Extending the Lower Rio Grande regional boundary up to Elephant Butte Reservoir.

Southeast NM Quadrant

This portion of the state includes the following former regions (fully or partially):

- Tularosa-Sacramento-Salt Basins
- Lower Pecos Valley
- Lea County

The Southeast area of New Mexico is home to 17% of the state's population and is primarily served by groundwater, although some areas are served by the Pecos River. This quadrant of the state has the highest percentage of agricultural water use in New Mexico, at 82% of total use. Administratively, this region also includes one interstate compact (i.e., Pecos).

Common responses and potential consideration for boundary mapping in this area of the state include:

- Grouping areas with common water sources and concerns together, with some areas primarily served by the Ogallala Aquifer facing declining supply and water quality issues and others served by the Pecos River and impacted by drought and wildfire.

Additional Observations

Based on review of the response themes, and building on the considerations for boundary-making, other observations that could inform the creation of regional boundaries include:

- Collaboration and flexibility along regional boundaries appear to be desirable. Rather than serving as "hard edges" for planning purposes, boundaries may serve to focus planning and implementation efforts. Places along the edges of boundaries could be included in multiple regional plans, both in terms of engagement and project prioritization – this type of collaboration appears desirable and necessary for statewide water planning success.
- The number and size of regions reflects a balance between the avoidance of very large regions that require significant travel to meetings and accounting for capacity constraints to manage the planning process in smaller, rural regions.
- Some of the travel considerations associated with larger regions could be mitigated by offering through virtual/online processes.
- There may be value in establishing sub-areas within large regions to address specific needs and opportunities within each region (e.g., ecosystems, rural and urban differences, etc.).

Basis for Considerations

The observations and considerations related to boundaries and the number of water planning regions are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q2: What is most important to you when you think about planning for New Mexico's water future?

The top coded response regarding New Mexico's water future was "water availability," which accounted for the largest share of responses at 26%. The consistency of these results indicate support for the creation of regional boundaries based shaped largely on hydrology (i.e., watersheds, groundwater areas, etc.).

Q3: What is the biggest water challenge facing you and your neighbors? What are the biggest opportunities?

"Water availability" was most frequently cited as a challenge across all regions, representing 31% of coded responses. The consistency of these results indicate that hydrology is a high priority for future water planning and boundary-making.

Q4: In the next 50 years, New Mexico is expected to have at least 25% less water in rivers and a similar reduction in groundwater recharge. As water becomes more scarce, what are you most concerned about?

The most frequently selected concern was "Replenishment and sustainability of below ground stores of water (i.e., groundwater)," followed by "Enough water for future generations." By further emphasizing the importance of where water is found and the future availability of water, these responses further support the use of hydrology as the primary basis for boundary-making.

Q5: What do you think is most important to achieve by revising the regional water planning process?

The "Ability to customize plans to meet local needs" was the most frequently selected response across all regions (23%). Other common responses to this question related to the ability to calculate surface water and groundwater availability and need across a region. These responses indicate support for the coordination of regional boundaries with available water data.

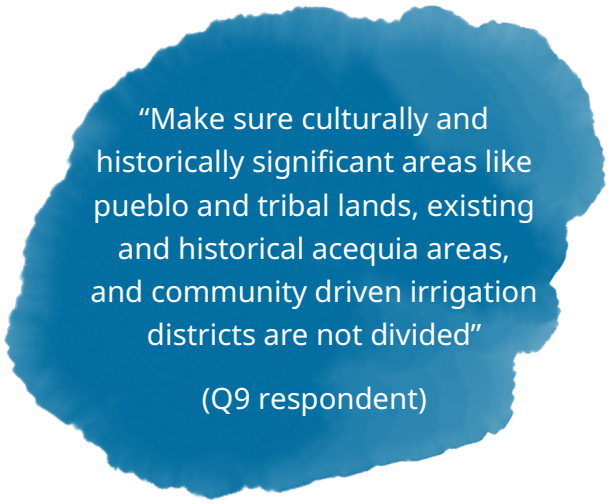
Q6: What communities do you consider to be part of your region?

The most common responses to this question were the names of cities and counties. These can be reviewed against draft boundary maps to confirm that cities and counties are appropriately grouped together.

In the Middle Rio Grande, Lower Rio Grande, Socorro Sierra, and Rio Chama regions, surface water features were frequent ways to describe those regions. This corroborates support for using hydrology as a primary basis for boundary-making and may help provide inspiration for future region names.

Q7: What do you think is most important in terms of how boundaries are delineated?

The majority of responses (57%) focused on water-related attributes, including "Where water is stored below ground" (31%) and "Where water is found above ground" (26%), further supporting the use of these hydrologic characteristics as the primary basis for boundary-making.



Q8: Which of the example boundary concept maps resonates with you most?

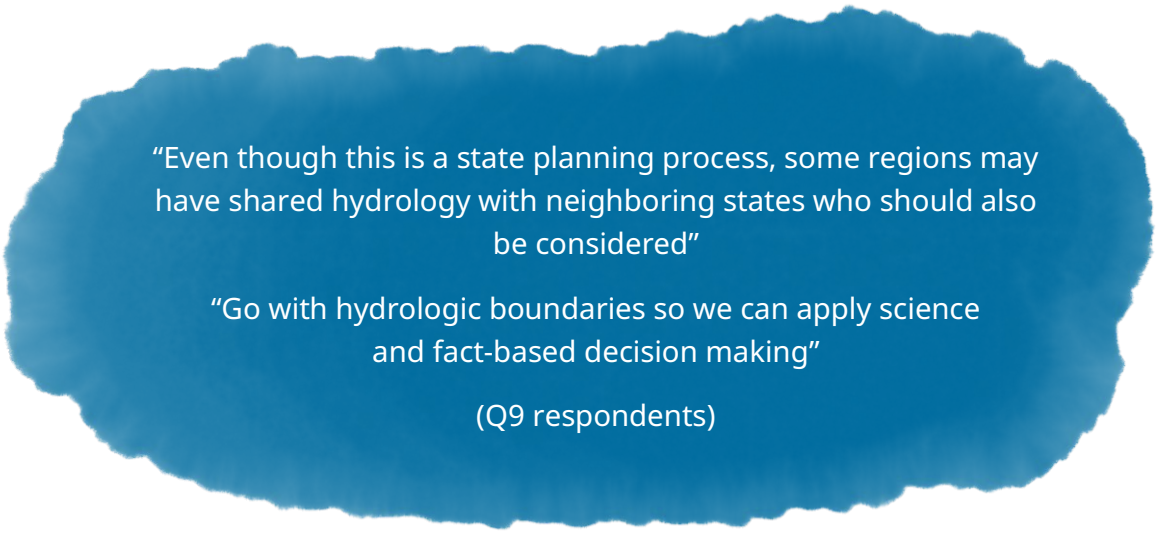
Nearly three quarters (74%) of responses to Question 8 indicated that hydrology-based boundaries resonate most. This option was the top choice across all regions, further supporting the use of boundaries primarily based on hydrologic characteristics.

The "Water rights district offices" response was the second most common choice (16%).

Q9: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining how to delineate future regional water planning boundaries?

Responses to Question 9 aligned closely with those to Question 7, indicating support for hydrology-based boundaries. Ecosystems and water rights administration were common categories of responses, as were responses related to grouping together those with similar concerns into regions.

Many comments focused on aligning with water rights and compact administration. These responses aligned with the second most common response to Question 8 ("Water rights district offices") and indicate support for coordinating water rights administration with regions and avoiding the fracture of administrative areas to the extent possible.



2. The criteria for commission approval of a regional water security plan with prioritized projects, programs and policies

Regional water planning aims to support the sustainable management of water resources for New Mexico's communities. While the specifics will vary, regional plans will serve as the guiding document for water planners, water users, legislators, and communities to understand their water future and what actions are needed to improve resilience, sustainability, and balance.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for characteristics and components to be included as criteria for the commission's approval of a regional water security plan include:

- Prioritizing the creation of plans that are measurable and data-driven with identified goals, metrics, and strategies.
- Maintaining consistency in the general structure and characteristics plans while creating flexibility to customize the topics and content to reflect the character, identity, and landscape of each region.
- Including the following components in each regional water security plan:
    - Existing Conditions Analysis
        - Analysis of existing water conditions to inform future planning (based on data availability) addressing topics such as:
            - current water demands by sector under dry, wet, and average conditions
            - current water availability (surface and groundwater)
            - ecosystem assessment
            - water management and water administration (e.g., legal obligations, reservoirs, water storage projects, pipelines)
            - recent, current, and planned projects.
    - Future Conditions Analysis
        - Analysis of anticipated future water conditions in the near-term (e.g., 10-years) and longer-term (e.g., 50-years) (based on data availability) addressing topics such as:
            - future water demands by sector under dry, wet, and average conditions (including an evaluation of how projected climate change will impact future water demand)
            - future water availability (surface and groundwater) (including an evaluation of how projected climate change will impact future water availability)
            - current and future water gap analysis
            - identification of where different sectors will have a gap between available supply and demands under wet, dry, and average conditions.
    - Water Security Goals and Strategies

        - Region-specific goals and strategies identified based on the future conditions analysis that could include, for example:
            - water balance
            - environment/ecosystem
            - endangered species (where relevant)
            - environmental or social justice
            - education.
    - Engagement Process Summary
        - A summary of the water security plan engagement process, including who was involved and how.
    - Prioritized List(s) of Projects and Programs
        - Prioritized list of projects/programs/policies overall and by category.
        - Summary of the prioritization criteria, process, and results.
        - Specific project implementation details for each prioritized list of projects/programs/policies including entities involved in the project, estimated completion date (if available), estimated water yield (if available).
        - Explanation of how identified projects/programs/policies connect to identified water security goals and strategies.
        - Explanation of any cross-region coordination or needs to complete identified projects/programs/policies.

Additional Observations

Based on review of the response themes, and building on the considerations for Rule 2, the following could further inform the criteria for commission approval of water security plans:

- The NMISC may consider developing a guidance document for regional water security planning similar to that used in other states. For example, the document provided by the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to the Basin Roundtables (BRTs) which outlines:
    - table of contents for each Colorado Basin Implementation Plan, including sections required for approval and others noted for optional inclusion
    - guidance on what each section of the Implementation should contain
    - information on what the CWCB will provide to the BRTs in terms of data and support.
- To support funding distribution, requirements for a region's prioritization process may be aligned with requirements outlined in Guidelines 2 and 3 describing the requirements and process for approvals of grants and loans.
- While there was interest among open house and survey respondents for a planning process that is highly customizable to each region, the NMISC may consider developing a list of categories within which projects and programs can be prioritized according to each

region's needs. This may enable comparison between regions for specific types of projects and facilitate the identification and prioritization of funding and resource needs. It also may allow for less funding and resource competition between different types of projects of different scales (e.g., infrastructure water supply project vs. educational water conservation campaign). Categories could include, for example:
    - water storage and supply projects
    - conservation and land use projects
    - engagement
    - innovative activities
    - agricultural projects
    - watershed health and recreation projects.
- To foster coordination among regions, NMISC may support cross-coordination on any identified projects/programs/policies that may impact multiple areas of the state.
- Data availability and quality will vary in each region. While data-informed plans are desirable, data assumptions, gaps, and uncertainty will be inherently be part of the planning process and water security plans.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

"We need to have a balanced and sustainable water budget"

"How climate change impacts NM's water supply and the severity of the impact for future generations"

"Equity and balance for people, wildlife and future generations of each"

"Having a clear understanding of water use in all regions of New Mexico is necessary"

(Q2 respondents)

Q2: What is most important to you when you think about planning for New Mexico's water future?

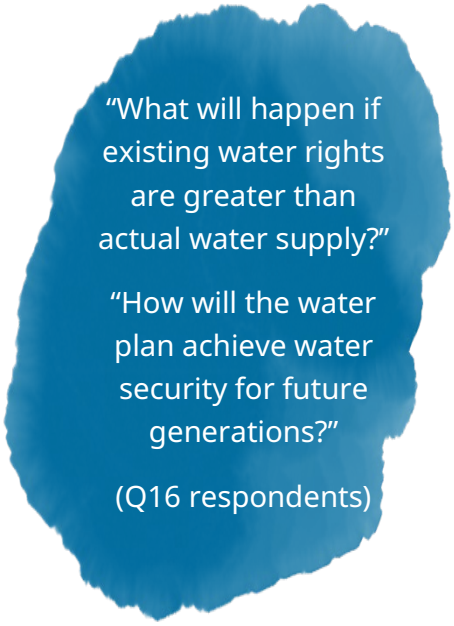
The responses to this question support the inclusion of current and future conditions analysis related to water balance in regional water security planning.

The top coded response regarding New Mexico's water future was "water availability and supply," which accounted for the largest share of responses at 26%, indicating a widespread priority on securing reliable water sources for the future.

Other responses underscore the importance of including additional analysis and considerations specific to each region. "Water conservation" and "environment" each represented 14% of coded responses, and were each top coded responses in several regions, indicating a desire to see these considerations represented in planning processes. "Governance, policy, and planning" was the fourth most common coded responses and rose to the top in some regions, highlighting the importance of connecting the water security planning process with existing systems of water administration, compacts, and commitments and the need to coordinate both within and across regions.

Q16: What key questions should each regional plan answer?

Of the fixed choice-options provided, "How can the region work to balance water needs to water availability?" was the most common response (17% of responses). The following two most common responses were related fixed-choice responses of "How much water is available?" and "How much water will be available in 2075?" (each 12% of responses). Combined, these related answers accounted for 41% of responses, supporting the inclusion of current and future water balance analysis as a criterion for approval of the plans, and including estimated water yield in prioritized lists.



Q28: Regional water security plans are required to have prioritized projects, programs, and policies. The prioritization of these by region should be accomplished by

Question 28 asked respondents for input on the process for prioritizing projects, programs, and policies in regional water security plans and provided four potential options. The most frequently selected answer (56%) was for plans to include "multiple prioritized lists based on general categories" or types of projects, with less support for more prescriptive prioritization methods. These responses indicate support for each region having the ability to sort projects by category, and prioritize within each category to develop a comprehensive, categorized, and prioritized list.

3. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to develop and provide notice to the commission of issues and concerns relating to the public welfare of the water planning region

Previously referenced as "public interest," in 1985, New Mexico legislature amended language in the state's water code to require the State Engineer to consider "public welfare" in the water permitting and application process. Common throughout the west, public welfare requirements aim to ensure that proposed uses of water support public interests, including but not limited to, availability of supply, environmental protection, economic interests, public health and safety, recreational uses, and/or adherence to water rights/regulations. New Mexico's state water code, however, does not define public welfare, which presents challenges for consistently applying public welfare criteria in the water administration processes.

The considerations for rulemaking aim to define a procedure to notify the commission of issues or concerns related to public welfare based on identified public welfare considerations or issues in the water planning region. In addition, the WSPA includes a provision that the outcomes of each regional water planning entity shall "consider public welfare values, balancing water uses and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans." Note, the questions in this section were designed by the New Mexico Office of State Engineer (NMOSE) and NMISC. Brendle Group summarized responses and considerations. Public welfare is a complex area of water law in New Mexico and assistance from NMOSE's legal team was integral to addressing this topic.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for developing issues relating to public welfare of the planning region include:

- Clearly defining public welfare within each regional plan to support the State Engineer in consistent evaluation of water rights permitting and administration.
- Taking into consideration all positions and water rights holders, including the public and environmental interests, in the creation of definitions.
- Allowing for variation in issues relating to public welfare from region to region to accommodate varying water interest and use.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations to provide notice to the commission of issues relating to public welfare of the planning region include:

- Ensuring that all notices and decisions regarding public welfare in the regional water planning and permit application process and/or proceedings are documented in writing and shared with the public.
- Providing an opportunity during the permitting process for the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties to comment on issues related to public welfare. Ensuring that these comments are taken into consideration by the State Engineer when issuing permits.

- Developing a process for regional residents, water rights holders, and interested parties to comment on issues related to public welfare and elevate those comments by providing notice to the NMISC.

Basis for Considerations

Q20: To help us better understand your perspective on public welfare, please express how strongly you agree or disagree.

Question 20 asked online open house participants to indicate their degree of agreement with a series of seven statements related to public welfare. Participants were able to rank their opinion from strongly agree, agree, agree more than disagree, disagree more than agree, disagree, disagree strongly, and no opinion. A summary of response in relation to Rule 3 include:

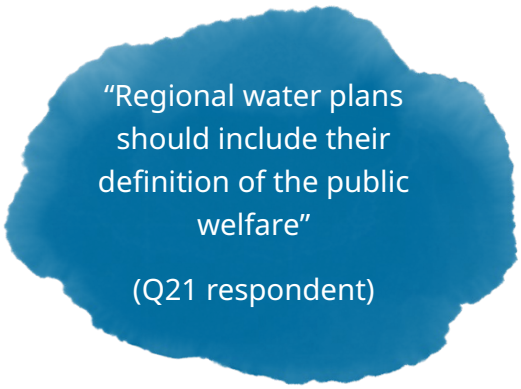
- 92% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that the State Engineer should explain his/her reasoning in relation to those issues in appropriate permit application proceedings, supporting the key consideration of a requirement that all notices and decisions be documented in writing and shared with the public.
- 87% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that regional planning entities should contain meaningful standards that can be applied by the State Engineer in evaluating water rights applications, supporting the key consideration that public welfare be clearly defined in regional water plans.
- 85% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that all water rights holders or other interested parties must have a fair opportunity to participate in the process. This supports the key consideration to allow the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties an opportunity to comment on issues related to public welfare, and for the State Engineer to take these comments into consideration when issuing permits.
- 81% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that all participants should be taken into consideration in identifying issues or concerns related to public welfare, supporting the key consideration that public welfare be clearly defined and take into consideration all positions and water rights holders, including the public and environmental interests.
- 81% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that the public may suggest for consideration possible issues or concern related to public welfare This supports the key consideration to allow the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties an opportunity to comment on issues related to public welfare, and for consideration of these comments by the State Engineer when issuing permits.
- 85% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that issues or concerns identified by regional water planning entities should rise to a sufficient level to be fairly considered as affecting the public welfare of the state, supporting the key

consideration that public welfare be clearly defined in regional water plans to support the State Engineer in consistent evaluation of water rights permitting and administration.

- 57% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that determinations to public welfare issues should not be binding on the State Engineer, supporting the perspective that while there should be a process for the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties to comment on issues related to public welfare, public welfare determinations made by the State Engineer should not be binding.

Q21: Do you have additional comments on public welfare that you would like NMISC to consider?

The top coded response were comments related to "Components of Public Welfare" at 40% of the 71 responses received. Among these comments, climate change, environmental, and wildlife considerations emerged as a common theme. Additionally, 29% of the comments were related to the "Process for defining Public Welfare" and 22% were related to "Implementation of Public Welfare considerations." Common themes of comments coded to these two responses included the need for regions and plans to clearly define public welfare issues at the local level and to ensure public welfare is encompassing of all interests in a water planning region.



4. The composition of a regional water planning entity

The future regional water planning process will continue to be overseen by the NMISC; however, success of the regional water planning process will depend on buy-in and the ability to implement plans at the local level. Regional water planning will be led by a stakeholder body (regional water planning entity) that is empowered to make recommendations and implement solutions.

The WSPA includes provisions related to the composition of regional water planning entities, including stating that they shall:

- Be composed of regional stakeholders.
- Ensure opportunities for participation by Indian nations, tribes or pueblos located within the water planning region.

The WSPA engagement results largely corroborate these provisions and key considerations for the composition of regional water planning entities include:

- The formation of water planning entities composed of a diverse group of water users and stakeholders.
- Providing for flexibility in the size and composition of the regional water planning entities, allowing for variation between regions to reflect differences in size and characteristics.
- Establishing water planning entities as permanent bodies that maintain a minimum membership level and structure to support both plan creation and implementation over time.
- Allowing regional planning entities to be composed of a mix of appointed members, representing key regional stakeholder organizations, and "at large" members elected by entity members, or through another election process to be determined.
- Specifying that members of the entity include, where relevant to the region, representatives from:
    - pueblos, tribes, and nations
    - acequias/community ditch associations
    - soil and water conservation districts
    - state agencies
    - water associations
    - agricultural water users
    - county government
    - municipal government.
- Other key stakeholders could be represented as "at large" members. These at-large members will help increase diverse representation on the water planning entity and may include representatives of the following groups:
    - public interest groups
    - federal agencies
    - any water rights user, whether they hold rights or not
    - environmental and public interest groups

    - education or research establishments.
- Requiring that all members of the planning entity:
    - reside within the water planning region
    - have professional experience with water
    - have fixed terms that are longer than 2 years.

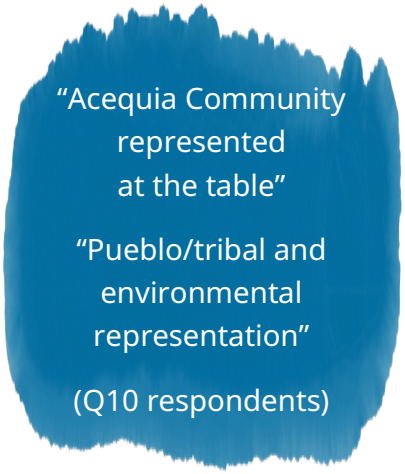
Additional Observations

The following are other reflections and ideas based on the engagement responses related to the composition of a regional planning entity:

- Additional administrative considerations may also influence the composition of the regional water planning entity, particularly in how members are appointed or elected.
    - The NMISC may consider recommending that each key stakeholder organization have a permanent seat on the entity, and that a representative be appointed by that organization.
    - If one of these appointed individuals were to step down or leave the organization, it could be the responsibility of that organization to appoint a new representative.
    - Once established, appointed members could elect at-large members, representative of regional interests and perspectives.
    - The NMISC may consider including an open-comment period before the election of at-large members, to ensure the public and organizations have an opportunity to provide written input to inform the election of potential at-large members.
- The NMISC may consider providing stipulations that define a process for removing a member from the planning entity who is not participating or adhering to the planning entities' guidelines as well as an alternative process for appointment if there is not sufficient interest to form a regional planning committee in a particular region.
- To allow for greater participation, the water planning entity could be composed of voting and non-voting members where non-voting members are representatives from government agencies, interested individuals, or other organizations. These non-voting or "observer" members may be invited to participate and comment in meetings but not have a decision-making vote.
- To ensure coordinated ecological and environmental involvement, representation could be selected from regional, state-wide, or nationally recognized environmental conservation organizations that have operated in New Mexico for a defined period (e.g., 5-years) and/or have a clear organizational mission/vision related to New Mexico water matters.
- To support the administrative needs of the planning entity, State of New Mexico involvement may be in a different capacity than other planning entity members. For example, each planning entity may have a state liaison that resides within the region and supports the planning entity as well as coordinates with NMISC.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.



Q10: What are the qualities that you would like to have in a planning process?

The top fixed-choice response was "Representative of the diversity of water users and stakeholders" at 31% with additionally high response rate that the planning process should be "Nimble adaptive and responsive to changing needs" and "Protected from special interest groups" at 24% each. These answers indicate support for diverse composition of the water planning entity, and flexibility to meet the needs of different regions.

Q11: What characteristics should future planning entity members have?

The top responses for each of Question 11's options indicate support for:

- members being required to "Reside within the region" (75% of responses, majority in 17 of 17 regions)
- members with "Professional" water experience (64% of responses, majority in 14 out of 17 regions)
- terms for serving that are "Fixed" (62% of responses, majority in 13 out of 17 regions)
- fixed terms that are "Long (2+ years)" (79% of responses, majority in 17 or 17 regions)
- "flexible" committee sizes (66% of responses, majority in 12 out of 17 regions)

Additionally, while the top-response indicated a slight majority for "Members Shall be Elected" (58% of responses, majority in 12 out of 17 regions) there were also several open-ended comments indicating a desire to have a mix of appointed and elected members (see Question 15), informing the consideration to allow for mix of appointed and elected members.

Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?

Groups were given a weighted score between 0 and 4 to represent the responses received for this question and summarize who and how different groups should be involved in the water planning process and water planning entity. A score of 4 indicated maximum involvement and a score of 0 indicated no involvement. The following groups received a score above 3, indicating they should be highly engaged and empowered members on the water planning entity:

- pueblos, tribes, and nations
- acequias/community ditch associations
- soil and water conservation districts
- state agencies
- water associations
- agricultural water users
- county government

- municipal government.

Below is list of groups that scored lower than 3, but higher than 2, indicating that at a minimum, they should be "consulted" during the process. While not universally recognized as priority members, these groups may still be represented on the water planning entity. Their score indicates that, in certain regions, they should be consulted throughout the planning process and may be appropriate for "at large" membership. These groups include:

- largest water users
- largest water right holders
- environmental interest groups
- public interest groups
- federal agencies
- any water rights holder
- general members of the public.

Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?

40% of open-ended responses to this question related to who should be on the planning entity. Specific comments emphasized the need for ecological interests to be represented on the regional planning entity even though they are not a specific "stakeholder." Additionally, comments highlighted the importance of involving the public, youth, and other subject matter experts on the regional planning entity even if they don't have a connection with water. The consistency of these results highlight that ecological interests may be represented on the planning entity in some circumstances, and that public interests should be considered in the planning process.

Additionally, 23% of responses were related to Question 11 and "What characteristics should future planning entity members have?" with several comments on the importance of including a mix of elected and appointed members to the water planning entity, as well as the need to clarify who is appointing or electing planning members. The consistency of these results suggest that a mix of appointed and elected officials could be considered. Regardless of the mix, defining who will be appointing or electing members will be an important consideration when defining the process.

"Members must demonstrate specific potential for being directly affected by outcome of water management decisions other than "water is required for life""

"Scientists should be included in the process"

(Q15 respondents)

5. The procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans

Previously referenced as "public interest," in 1985, New Mexico legislature amended language in the state's water code to require the State Engineer to consider "public welfare" in the water permitting and application process. Common throughout the west, public welfare requirements aim to ensure that proposed uses of water support public interests, including but not limited to, availability of supply, environmental protection, economic interests, public health and safety, recreational uses, and/or adherence to water rights/regulations. New Mexico's state water code, however, does not define public welfare, which presents challenges for consistently applying public welfare criteria in the water administration processes.

The considerations for this aspect of rulemaking aim to define a procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans. Note, the questions in this section were designed by the Office of State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission. Brendle Group summarized responses and considerations. Public welfare is a complex area of water law in New Mexico and assistance from NMOSE's legal team was integral to addressing this topic.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for defining a procedure for a regional water planning entity to consider public welfare values and the needs of future generations of New Mexicans include:

- Clearly defining public welfare within each regional plan to support the State Engineer in consistent evaluation of water rights permitting and administration.
- Considering all positions and water rights holders, including the public and environmental interests, in developing definitions.
- Accommodating varying water interest and use across regions, by allowing issues relating to public welfare to vary from region to region.
- Documenting in writing and sharing with the public all notices and decisions regarding public welfare in the regional water planning and permit application process and/or proceedings.
- Providing opportunities for the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties to comment on issues related to public welfare during the permitting process. Ensuring that the State Engineer take these comments into consideration when issuing permits.
- Stipulating that public welfare determinations made by the State Engineer will not be binding.

Basis for Considerations

Q20: To help us better understand your perspective on public welfare, please express how strong you agree or disagree.

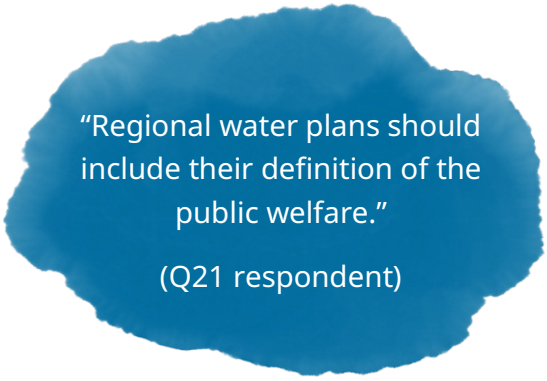
Question 20 asked online open house participants to indicate their degree of agreement with a series of seven statements related to public welfare. Participants were able to rank their opinion

from strongly agree, agree, agree more than disagree, disagree more than agree, disagree, disagree strongly, and no opinion. A summary of response in relation to Rule 3 include:

- 92% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that the State Engineer should explain his/her reasoning in relation to those issues in appropriate permit application proceedings, supporting the key consideration to require all notices and decisions to be documented in writing and shared with the public.
- 87% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that regional planning entities should contain meaningful standards that can be applied by the State Engineer in evaluating water rights applications, supporting the key consideration that public welfare be clearly defined in regional water plans.
- 85% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that all water rights holders or other interested parties must have a fair opportunity to participate in the process. This response supports the key consideration to allow the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties an opportunity to comment on issues related to public welfare and for the State Engineer to take these comments into consideration when issuing permits.
- 81% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that all participants should be taken into consideration in identifying issues or concerns related to public welfare, supporting the key consideration that public welfare be clearly defined and take into consideration all positions and water rights holders, including the public and environmental interests.
- 81% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that the public may suggest for consideration a possible issues or concern related to public welfare. This response supports the key consideration to allow the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties an opportunity to comment on issues related to public welfare and for the State Engineer to take these comments into consideration when issuing permits.
- 85% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that issues or concerns identified by regional water planning entities should rise to a sufficient level to be fairly considered as affecting the public welfare of the state, supporting the key consideration that public welfare be clearly defined in regional water plans to support the State Engineer in consistent evaluation of water rights permitting and administration.
- 57% of respondents strongly agreed, agreed, or agreed more than disagreed that determinations to public welfare issues should not be binding on the State Engineer, supporting the key consideration that while there should be a process for the public, all water rights holders, and interested parties to comment on issues related to public welfare, public welfare determinations made by the State Engineer will not be binding.

Q21: Do you have additional comments on public welfare that you would like NMISC to consider?

The top coded response were comments related to "Components of Public Welfare" at 40% of the 71 received responses. Among these comments, climate change, environmental, and wildlife considerations emerged as a common theme. Additionally, 29% of the comments were related to the "Process for defining Public Welfare" and 22% were related to "Implementation of Public Welfare considerations." Common themes of comments coded to these two responses included the need for regions and plans to clearly define public welfare issues at the local level and to ensure public welfare is encompassing of all interests in a water planning region.



Guidelines Development

The WSPA outlines eight guidelines to be developed for regional water planning. While the structure and content of guidelines will be determined through the formal review and adoption process, this report outlines key considerations for each of the guidelines identified in the WSPA:

1. The identification of regional stakeholders and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration.
2. The public input requirements for regional water planning.
3. The requirements for a proposal for grants or loans for planning activities.
4. The process for approval of grants or loans.
5. The process for state agency collaboration.
6. The metrics for reporting on regional water projects, programs, and policies.
7. The procedures to support implementation of a regional water security plan.
8. The schedule for implementation of regional water planning, including integration with statewide objectives.

1. The identification of regional stakeholders and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration

Beyond the formal water planning entity, broad and robust community and stakeholder participation is necessary in the development of regional water plans to ensure local water-related needs are considered in the planning process and enhance plan acceptance and the likelihood of plans being implemented. In addition to the development of rules and guidelines for regional water planning, the WSPA requires the NMISC to:

- emphasize engagement, communication and education in regional water planning activities statewide
- provide engagement with pueblos, tribes, and pueblos, including consultation via the State-Tribal Collaboration Act
- provide engagement with acequia communities
- provide for the equitable engagement of rural and at-risk communities.

The considerations for stakeholder identification and collaboration based on the open house and survey responses align with and may inform implementation of these other WSPA provisions.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for **identification of regional stakeholders** include:

- Forming a regional stakeholder group composed of diverse water users and stakeholders.
- Developing an engagement strategy at the beginning of the regional water planning process to define who should be engaged and at what frequency. While engagement lists will vary depending on the region, groups considered in the engagement strategy may include:
    - pueblos, tribes, and nations
    - acequias/community ditch associations

    - soil and water conservation districts
    - state agencies
    - water associations
    - agricultural water users
    - county government
    - municipal government
    - largest water users
    - largest water right holders
    - environmental interest groups
    - public interest groups
    - federal agencies
    - any water rights holder
    - public interest groups
    - general members of the public
    - local subject matter experts (e.g., educators or researchers).
- In the engagement strategy, including the proposed approach for engaging planning entities for adjacent regions, along with communities and organizations that may be on the edges of or fall within multiple regions.

Additionally, based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for **opportunities for stakeholder collaboration** include:

- Inviting all pueblos, tribes, nations and stakeholders identified in the engagement strategy to engage early in the planning process, and as it progresses. Engagement with pueblos, tribes, nations, and stakeholders may be combined or overlap with the public engagement requirements described in Guideline 2.
- Providing a draft regional water plan for review by all pueblos, tribes, nations, and stakeholders prior to finalization (see Guideline 2).
- Allowing regional water planning entities to define in their engagement strategy which tactics will be used to engage different groups. Examples of engagement tactics the water planning entity could use include public meetings (in-person and virtual), sharing updates and information via websites, newsletters, etc., surveys/comment forms, and/or focus groups/listening sessions.
- Launching a state-wide education campaign for the public, with tailored content for the K-12 student population, to increase general water awareness and collaboration for the whole of New Mexico.

Additional Observations

The following are observations based on the engagement responses related to the identification of regional stakeholders and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration:

- The state may consider supporting the identification of pueblos, tribes, nations, and stakeholder by helping regional water planning entities identify potential groups through a stakeholder mapping process and engagement strategy development.
- The state may consider supporting the regional planning entities with communication to these groups throughout the planning process.
- A statewide water education campaign could help ensure proper and consistent messaging across all regions in New Mexico. This would need to be coordinated to include regionally specific facts and messaging. Regional groups and stakeholders could have an important role in sharing and disseminating campaign materials and supporting education efforts.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q10: What are the qualities that you would like to have in a planning process?

The top fixed-choice response was "Representative of the diversity of water users and stakeholders" at 31%. Additionally, responses rates were high for the planning process should be "Nimble adaptive and responsive to changing needs" and "Protected from special interest groups" (24% each). These answers support the engagement of a diverse group of people and stakeholders throughout the process, while allowing for regional flexibility in the individuals and groups engaged to meet the needs of different regions.

Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?

Pueblos, tribes, nations, and stakeholders were given a weighted score between 0 and 4 to summarize how respondents feel that different entities should be involved in the water planning process and water planning entity. A score of 4 indicated maximum involvement and a score of 0 indicated no involvement. All the 16 groups listed received a score of 2 or above, supporting the consideration that all groups at least be "consulted" (e.g., provide feedback on key decision points and milestones at events like open houses, via surveys, and/or comments on final draft of the plan) in the water planning process. The 16 groups listed included:

- pueblos, tribes, and nations
- acequias/community ditch associations
- soil and water conservation districts
- state agencies

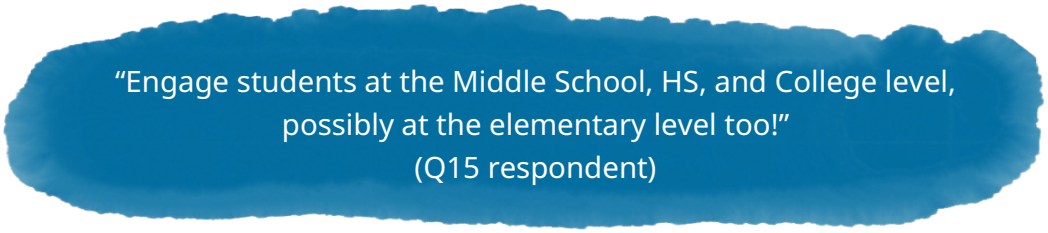
- water associations
- agricultural water users
- county government
- municipal government
- largest water users
- largest water right holders
- environmental interest groups
- public interest groups
- federal agencies
- any water rights holder
- public interest groups
- general members of the public.

In addition, open comments indicated support for consulting subject matter experts like educators or researchers during the water planning process.

Q14: In what other ways should New Mexicans be engaged in the water planning process?

All participation options listed in question 14 garnered over 10% of the total, highlighting that New Mexicans want to be engaged in different ways throughout the process. "Be invited to attend information events/open houses about the water planning process" was the most frequently selected response across all regions (26% of responses), closely followed by "Review and comment on draft regional water plans before they are finalized" (25% of responses). "Receive information about the process via websites, newsletters etc." garnered 20% of the responses, followed by "Participate in focus groups or listening sessions" with 18% of responses, and "Complete online surveys/comment forms" at 11%. The level of interest in all categories supports the consideration that regions leverage as many of these engagement tactics as possible to engage pueblos, tribes, nations, and stakeholders throughout the process.

In addition, there were a high number of open-ended comments (29%) related to the importance of education including incorporation into K-12 curriculum, as well as offering general opportunities for the public to learn about water planning and topics like conservation, administration, and how New Mexicans use water.



Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?

Notably, 9% of comments highlighted the importance of involving the public, youth, and other subject matter experts in the water planning process. This highlights the benefits of including the public in the stakeholder process, as well as developing a state-wide education campaign to increase water knowledge and awareness.

Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?

For this question, 17% of responses highlighted the importance of raising awareness and educating the public about water issues, supporting the development of a statewide education campaign related to water.

2. The public input requirements for regional water planning

In addition to the formal water planning entity and stakeholder engagement, public participation is also necessary in the development of regional water plans to increase public awareness of the region's key water issues, enhance plan acceptance and likelihood of support for plan implementation. The WSPA includes a provision that regional water planning entities obtain public input in the development, vetting, and prioritization of regional water planning activities and proposals. This guideline will outline the requirements for obtaining that public input.

The considerations provided for Guideline 2 align with and may inform implementation the WSPA provision that the NMISC "emphasize engagement, communication and education in regional water planning activities" and that "provide for the equitable engagement of rural and at-risk communities."

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for the public input requirements for regional water planning include the following:

- Engaging the public in a minimum of two public meetings while the plan is being developed.
- Regional water planning entities providing additional public engagement opportunities, beyond the minimum two public meetings. These opportunities could include additional public meetings, sharing updates and information via websites, newsletters, etc., surveys/comment forms, or focus groups/listening sessions.
- Including a mix of in-person and online participation options for public engagement.
- Allowing the public to review and comment on the draft regional water plans before they are finalized.
- Documenting in the final plan all public comments received at the public meetings, though engagement opportunities, and on draft regional water plan.

Additional Observations

Other observations related to the public input requirements for regional water planning, based on review of engagement responses and process include:

- While offering both in-person and online engagement appears key to diverse participation, the mix of in-person and online engagement opportunities may be determined by the regions to reflect their unique geography and characteristics. For example, virtual/online engagement may be particularly important for large regions where participants would otherwise need to travel long distances to engage in the planning process (see Rule 1 considerations).
- Given the WSPA emphasis on engaging rural and at-risk communities, the NMISC may consider a range of participation options that eliminate barriers such as access to a stable internet connection or lengthy travel. This could include, for example: providing engagement resources (e.g., presentations, paper surveys) to local community partners with existing connections in rural areas, multiple in-person opportunities distributed

throughout larger regions, meeting spaces or computer access for remote participation, or the provision of travel support and/or stipends for participation in the planning process.

- The WSPA engagement planning process included materials in English and Spanish, and participants engaged in both languages. The engagement strategy process (see Guideline 1) could include the identification of language needs and allocation of resources to meeting interpretation and/or translation of materials as appropriate, based on regional population characteristics.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q1: Have you been involved with state-led regional water planning before?

While 54% of all open house and online respondents indicated that they had never been involved with water planning before, this rose to 72% when looking at only the online responses. This indicates that the online format is particularly effective in engaging participants new to water planning and may bring previously underrepresented perspectives to the table. Conversely, the in-person open house and meeting format appears to be more effective at engaging those who had attended numerous water planning meetings in the past (26% in-person, 10% online), potentially attracting individuals with important historical context or subject matter expertise.

Q13: Is the current requirement for a minimum of two general public meetings during each planning cycle sufficient?

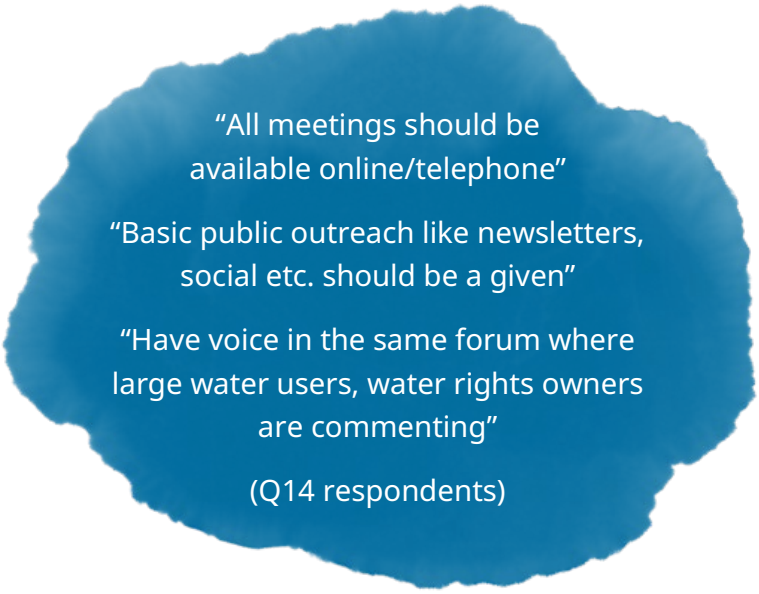
All (100%) of respondents indicated there should be one or more public meetings, with the top response being (“A few more than 2 public meetings) at 41% followed by “A minimum of 2 public meetings should be required” (26%). These results highlight the need for a minimum of 2 public meetings during the reginal water planning process and support the consideration to provide more opportunities for engagement as resources allow.

Q14: In what other ways should New Mexicans be engaged in the water planning process?

All options to question 14 garnered over 10% of the total, highlighting New Mexicans want to be engaged in different ways throughout the process. “Be invited to attend information events/open houses about the water planning process” was the most frequently selected response across all regions (26% of responses), closely followed by “Review and comment on draft regional water plans before they are finalized” (25% of responses). “Participate in focus groups or listening sessions” garnered 18% of responses, followed by “Complete online surveys/comment forms” at 11%.

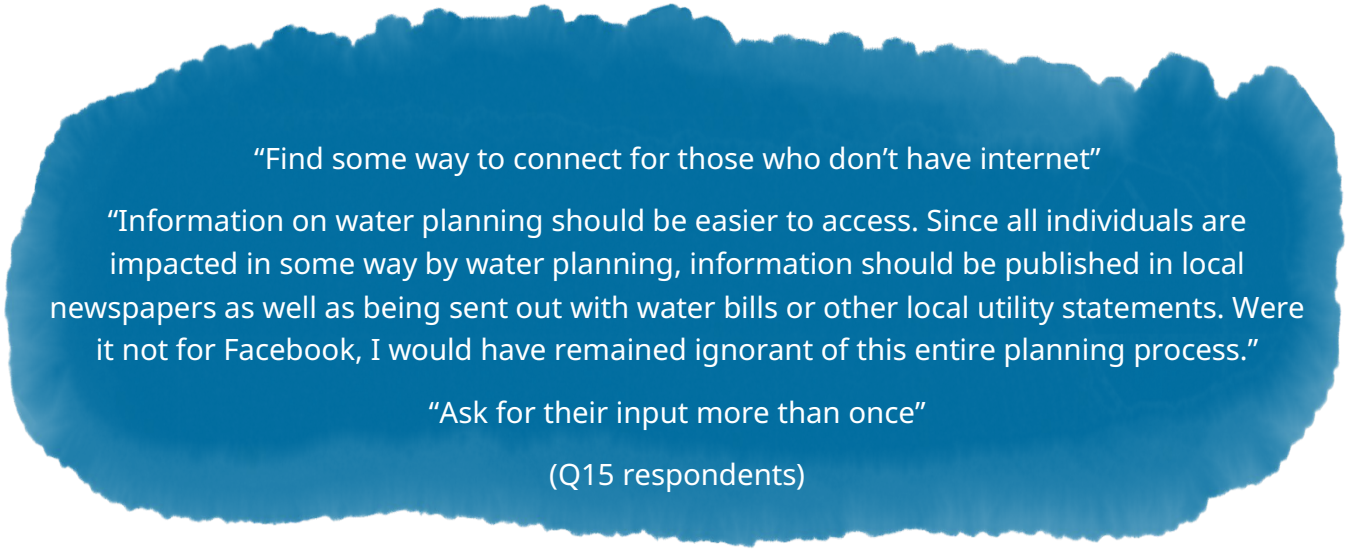
These responses indicate support for engaging New Mexicans in public meetings, as well as allowing comment on the draft plan. Additional engagement opportunities like listening sessions, focus groups, or surveys may also be offered to the public as resources allow.

Additionally, while not the top comment response, 8% of the open-ended comments were related to ensuring the process engagement process is transparent, highlighting the importance of sharing the feedback gathered through the engagement process.



Q15: Are there any other considerations not highlighted here that should be included in determining who will be involved in regional water planning and how future regional planning entities will function?

In response to this question, 9% of comments highlighted the importance of involving the public, youth, and other subject matter experts in the water planning process even if they don't have a connection with matter. This highlights the benefits of including the public in the stakeholder process, as well as exploring a state-wide education campaign to increase awareness.



3. The requirements for a proposal for grants or loans for planning activities

The WSPA provides for the NMISC to "make grants or loans of funds for the purpose of regional water planning" and Guideline 3 involves the development of requirements for proposals to support regional planning activities. This funding is intended to support water planning activities specifically, and not the implementation of projects and programs identified in regional plans, which will be funded through other sources.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for grant and loan proposal requirements include the following:

- Accepting proposals from a broad range of organizations, not restricted to a single type of entity. Municipalities, utilities, and other sub-divisions such as soil and water conservation districts or acequia associations may be eligible to apply for funding, in addition to the regional water planning entity.
- Requiring proposals to:
    - identify the planning lead and potential fiscal agent(s)
    - outline the scope of planning activities
    - identify disadvantaged communities located within the planning area and language translation/interpretation needs
    - describe the funding need and urgency.

Additional Observations

Other observations related to the requirements for proposals for grants and loans, based on review of engagement responses and process include:

- To further support tracking, evaluation, and comparison, it may be helpful for proposals to:
    - Describe the plan need, objective and primary outcome (e.g., regional water security plan, municipal water efficiency plan etc.). In describing the urgency of planning needs, regions may optionally rely on existing definitions such as that used by the Water Trust Board to require projects certified as Urgent by a state agency head or authorized designee in accordance with defined criteria.
    - Demonstrate how the plan will contribute to identified water security objectives at the regional or state level, if not developing a regional water security plan.
    - Detail the proposed engagement strategy for the planning process, including with key stakeholder organizations, pueblos, tribes, nations, acequia associations, rural and at-risk communities, and the general public.
    - Identify and describe any impact or potential of the proposed planning activity on neighboring region's water plan goals, existing or anticipated settlement agreements, compacts, and endangered species commitments
    - Describe the source of any matching resources.

- The NMISC could create guidelines for the identification of disadvantaged communities, for example by aligning with criteria established by the Federal government through the Justice40 initiative, aligning with income criteria used by other New Mexico state agencies, or defining new criteria using publicly available data.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q22: Who should be eligible to apply for grants or loans for planning activities?

Respondents provided feedback on who should be eligible to apply for grants or loans supporting regional water planning activities. A majority (74%) of respondents indicated support for both future regional water planning entities and other political sub-divisions of the state—such as municipalities, soil and water conservation districts, acequias, water utilities, and county governments—being eligible to apply for funding.

Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grant or loans for planning activities

This question asked respondents to identify what they think should factor into the evaluation of funding applications. The top response, at 40%, was that funding should be distributed based on urgency of need. While the definition of urgency of need may vary between regions, this indicates that the allocation of funding may be tied either to statewide water objectives or to the region's prioritization of projects and programs using criteria developed during the planning process (see Rule 2).

Of respondents, 21% indicated that funding should be used to address the needs of disadvantaged communities, suggesting that the presence of any disadvantaged communities within the planning area should be identified in proposals.

Q24: Are there other factors NMISC should consider when thinking about funding water planning activities?

In response to this question, 84 comments were received, many of which related to broader funding-related issues. Responses were coded to multiple themes, with 31% of respondents focusing on the need to prioritize and evaluate funding allocations. Another 24% addressed the process for distributing funds, while 16% discussed the specific types of projects that should receive funding. Additionally, 15% of respondents commented on the eligibility criteria for funding applications.

"Holistic funding- balancing various needs"

"I would consider CLEAR scopes of work a very important part of funding water planning activities. Having a clear end point or deliverable will make for more successful projects across the state."

"If previous plans have projects that have not been implemented then the plan needs to include how to implement the plan. We can't just plan it must be implemented and that is what needs to be emphasized."

"I'd avoid too much bureaucracy dispersing funds. It is more important to fund meaningful projects than to ensure every box is checked. I'd rather waste some money or have some money get used in slightly different ways than it was meant for than have nothing get done because there are so many rules to apply for funding."

(Q24 respondents)

4. The process for approval of grants or loans

While Guideline 3 focuses on the requirements for a proposal for grants or loans, this guideline is designed to outline the process for approving grants or loans.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for the approval of grants or loans include the following:

- Prioritization of urgent needs and ensuring that disadvantaged communities receive adequate consideration.
- Requiring that applications for funding are complete and meet the criteria outline in Guideline 3 to qualify for approval.
- Tying the allocation of funding to the urgency of need, demonstrated through a connection to regional project prioritization, as determined by the region through the planning process (see Rule 2), or statewide water objectives.

Additional Observations

Other observations related to the process for the approval of grants and loans, based on review of engagement responses and process include:

- The NMISC may consider creating funding streams and opportunities to support different types of plans (e.g., regional water security plan, municipal water efficiency plan). In that instance, the process for approval of a funding proposal may be specific to the plan type and prioritized by type and/or region.
- Proposals from areas that include disadvantaged communities may receive additional consideration through the creation of set-aside funds, prioritization, or reduced matching requirements to ensure these communities are adequately supported.
- Consideration may be given to a hybrid application process for qualified proposals. This could include a rolling process for smaller projects that address urgent needs or benefit disadvantaged communities, in addition to a regular funding application cycle for more substantial allocations.
- In determining the urgency of planning needs, the ISC may draw on existing definitions such as that used by the Water Trust Board to require projects certified as “Urgent” by a state agency head or authorized designee in accordance with defined criteria.

Basis for Considerations

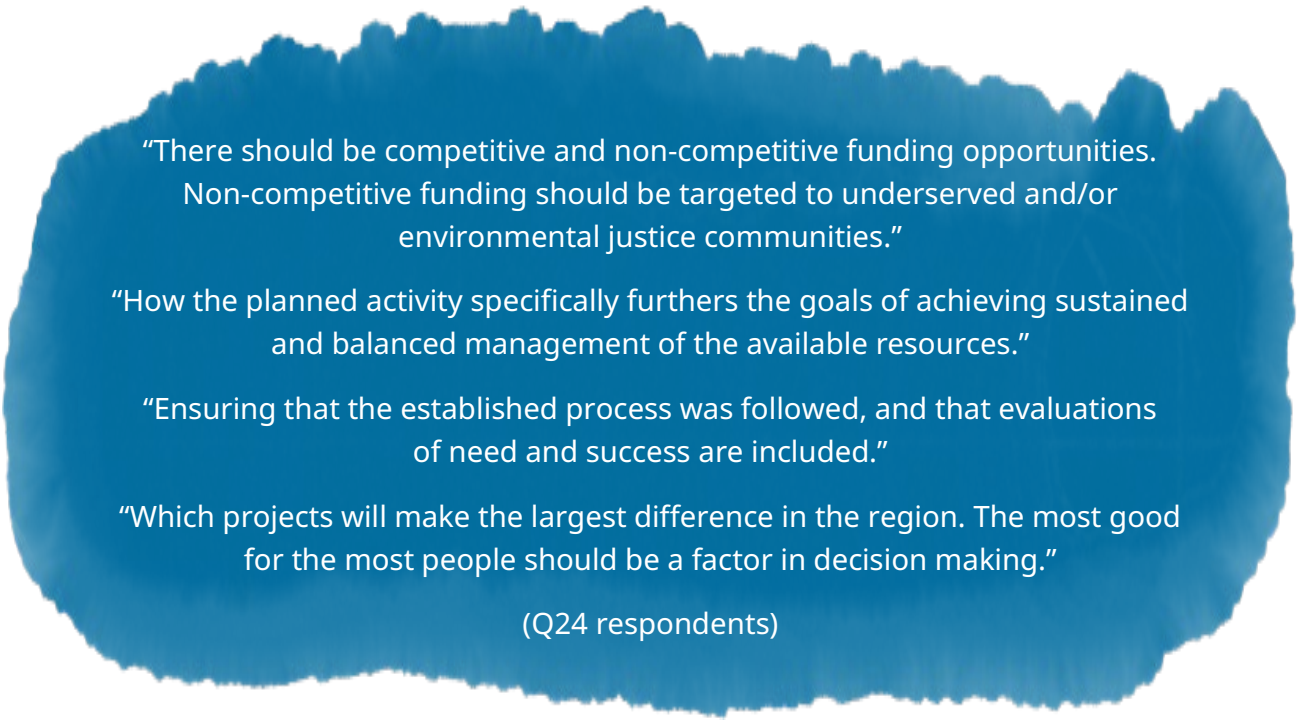
These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grants or loans for planning activities.

Respondents were asked to provide input on the priorities for distributing funding related to water planning activities. The top response was that funding should be distributed based on urgency of need (40%). Additionally, 27% of respondents supported funding distributed on a rolling basis for qualified proposals, and 21% preferred funding to be allocated preferentially for disadvantaged communities. Only 12% supported a competitive application process, indicating that most respondents favor a top-down evaluation based on established criteria rather than a competitive system.

Q24: Are there other factors NMISC should consider when thinking about funding water planning activities?

In response to this question, 84 comments were received, many of which related to broader funding-related issues. Responses were coded to multiple themes, with 31% of respondents focusing on the need to prioritize and evaluate funding allocations. Another 24% addressed the process for distributing funds, while 16% discussed the specific types of projects that should receive funding. Additionally, 15% of respondents commented on the eligibility criteria for funding applications.



5: The process for state agency collaboration

Collaboration between state agencies is needed for the development and implementation of water plans to ensure both that they are informed by the most up-to-date data and that identified goals and projects are not in conflict with other state agency priorities. Per the WSPA and the New Mexico Water Data Act, the NMISC will:

- Collaborate with other state agencies and research institutes to make up-to-date science, data and models relating to water resource planning available to regional water planning entities through an integrated water data and information platform.
- Prepare and distribute a report to state agencies that includes the regional water security plans, outcomes of plan implementation, and the status of regional water planning expenditures.

This guideline will outline the process for collaboration between state agencies and for state agency participation in the regional water planning process. The procedures for NMISC support of regional water plan implementation are outlined in Guideline 7.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, the following are key considerations to include in a guidance related to state agency collaboration in regional water planning:

- The process by which regional water planning entities will get information and support from state agencies, including through the integrated water data and information platform.
- A process for state agencies to review and comment on draft regional plans before they are finalized, in order to identify potential opportunities for collaboration and cross-reference with other established state goals and priorities.
- Outlining the role for state agency support for regional water plan implementation (see Guideline 7).

Additional Observations

Other observations related to the process for state agency collaboration on regional water planning, based on review of engagement responses and process include:

- In order to facilitate state agency collaboration related to regional water planning, the state could consider establishing a framework for regular information sharing and networking between agency staff working on interconnected water management issues (e.g., formal inter-agency task force, informal networking opportunities or events).
- The NMISC may consider collaborating with other state agencies on the development of a dashboard to report on regional water planning and implementation status.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?

Stakeholder groups were given a weighted score between 0 and 4 to represent the responses received for this question and summarize who and how different groups should be involved in the water planning process and water planning entity. A score of 4 indicated maximum involvement and a score of 0 indicated no involvement. State agencies (e.g., NMISC, NMOSE) received a score of 3.2, indicating strong support for engaging them in the planning process.

Q25: A guidance related to state agency collaboration should consider…

Question 25 asked respondents to provide input on what should be included in guidance defining the level and process for state agency collaboration in regional planning. The results indicated strong support for the guidance to cover three key areas: the process by which regional water planning entities receive support from state agencies, the process for state agencies to review and comment on draft plans, and the role state agencies will play in supporting regions to implement plans. Responses were evenly split among these three areas, reflecting the broad recognition of the importance of state agency involvement in regional water planning efforts.

Q31: Please provide any other highlights, thoughts, questions, suggestion, criticisms or things we might have missed in this questionnaire relate to regional water planning in New Mexico

The final question for both the in-person and online open house was optional and provided an opportunity for participants to share any other thoughts and considerations. The largest share of coded responses related to who should be involved in regional water planning and in what capacity, including comments specific to the role of state agencies.

"We want the [NM]ISC to consult with tribal advisory group (WSTAC) and the state to consult with the tribes affected by any new water rights permits or developments that will use or discharge water. Actively manage water resources using hydraulic [sic] modeling."

"What has been implemented successfully from past [NM]OSE/[NM]ISC planning? Any success stories that we can learn from?"

"There needs to be a massive effort to improve funding. The best idea is to push bond and Gen Fund appropriations to the Water Trust Fund. In addition, [NM]ISC/[NM]OSE could hire a grant coordinator to take advantage of federal money. This coordinator could also work with regional entities to assist in applying for [NM]ISC/[NM]OSE planning money."

(Q31 respondents)

6: The metrics for reporting on regional water projects, programs, and policies

To understand water-related needs and measure success, the state will require reporting metrics on regional projects, programs, and policies. This will help New Mexico better understand what investments are needed, their potential and actual impacts, and the overall success of the regional water planning process.

Based on the WSPA engagement process, key considerations for the metrics for reporting on regional water projects, programs, and policies for regional water planning include:

- Identifying metrics for inclusion in each regional water plan that align with the criteria outlined in Rule 2 and include, for example, key information on water availability and use.
- Requiring the development of region-specific metrics to report on plan implementation through the planning process and include, for example, metrics associated with each goal and objective identified in the plan.
- Requiring the following metrics and/or key information to be reported for each implemented project, program, and policy:
    - basic project, program, and policy information (e.g., type, timeline)
    - cost and funding information
    - implementing agencies
    - estimated impact on water balance in the region and adjacent regions (positive or negative)
    - estimated environmental/ecological impacts in the region and adjacent regions (positive or negative)
    - other related impacts as applicable for the project, program, or policy type.
- Requiring progress tracking and reporting on the metrics throughout the implementation process to demonstrate success/challenges and help regions understand any additional resources needed to successfully implement plans.
- Leveraging the integrated water data and information platform being developed pursuant to the Water Data Act to identify and report on metrics.

Additional Observations

The following additional observations are offered based on review of responses related to metrics for reporting on regional water projects, programs, and policies:

- Metrics may be developed to support both the prioritization of projects, programs, and policies in the regional water plan development (see Rule 2), and the evaluation of grant or loan proposals (see Guidelines 3 and 4), for example:
    - metrics to support prioritization based on “urgency of need”, including impacts on the water balance, impacts on disadvantaged groups, or other factors identified by each region

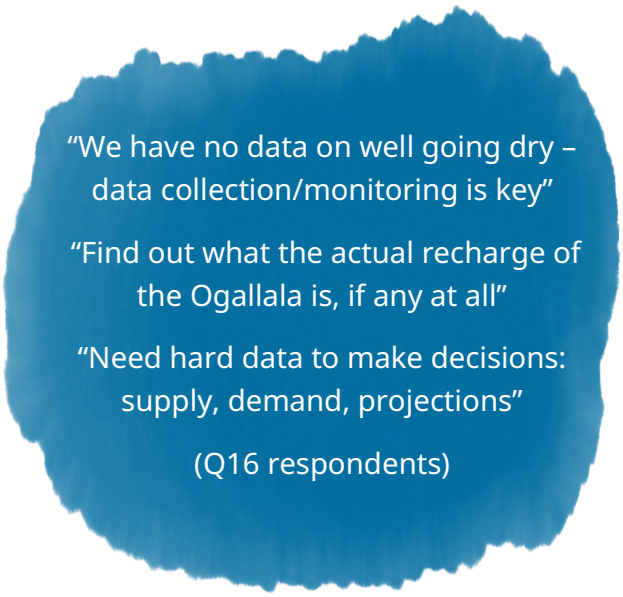
  - metrics aligning with general project, program, and policy categories that could include but are not limited to water availability/storage, conservation/land use, engagement/innovation activities, agricultural projects, and/or watershed health/recreation.
- To support ongoing metric tracking and reporting, the state could consider offering a common platform or mechanism for water planning entities to share metrics and report progress.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q16: What key questions should each regional plan answer?

Of the fixed choice-options provided "How can the region work to balance water needs to water availability?" was the most common response (17% of responses). The following two most common responses were related fixed-choice responses of "How much water is available?" and "How much water will be available in 2075?" (each 12% of responses). Combined, these related answers accounted for 41% of responses. The consistency of these responses indicates support for metrics that answer these questions though quantification of how selected programs, projects, and policies impact the overall water balance in the region and/or adjacent regions.



Q18: What key information would you like to know about the water projects, programs, and policies happening in your region?

The top response was "Impact on water balance" (26% of responses), followed by "Type of project, program, or policy" and "Ecological impacts" (each at 21%). This was also mirrored in the open-ended comments for the question. These answers highlight the need for basic tracking around the project, programs, and policies, as well as the need for metrics to track impacts such as the effects of the water balance and ecologically of the planning and adjacent planning regions.

"Report out on key metrics such as number of people receiving clean and safe drinking water"

"How are the water strategies being implemented and enforced?"

"Transparency on the process and updates"

(Q18 respondents)

Q19: What information is most important to track in the regional water planning process?

There was variation in the fixed-choice responses highlighting the need to track multiple types of metrics in the water planning process. Top answers across all regions include "Contributions to long-term water security for the region "and "Ability to achieve local water balance objectives" for a combined 32% of responses, or 20% and 12% respectively. These responses emphasize the importance for metrics to quantify the impact of projects, programs, and policies on the water balance. Additionally, in alignment with Question 18, the top coded opened-ended response was related to the importance of measuring the ecological impacts. The consistency of these results highlights the need to have metrics, and to ensure those metrics measure impacts to the water balance, and ecologically of the planning and adjacent planning regions.

"Impact of strategies and goals on long-term river health and sustainability"

"What is the progress made to reduce gap between future supply and future needs?"

"Number of schools with education programs in water scarcity. These should be tracked in the implementation phase of planning."

(Q19 respondents)

Questions 23: Choose up to two of the following priorities for evaluating funding of grants or loans for planning activities

The top response received to this question was "Urgency of need" at 40%. This response indicates support for metrics defined to help evaluate the "Urgency of need" by quantifying impacts to inform the prioritization of projects, programs, and policies.

Question 28: Regional water security plans are required to have prioritized projects, programs, and policies. The prioritization of these by region should be accomplished by

The top response to this question was "Multiple prioritized lists based on general categories that could include but are not limited to some of the following: water availability/storage, conservation/land use, engagement/innovation activities, agricultural projects, watershed health/recreation, etc." at 56%. Prioritization could partially be informed by metrics that align with these general categories.

Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?

For this question, 12% of responses focused on the need for tracking, monitoring, and analysis to ensure success, indicating the need for consistent metrics and ongoing evaluation to support implementation of the regional water plans.

7: The procedures to support implementation of a regional water security plan

The WSPA includes provisions for the NMISC to provide support to regional water planning, including by:

- Providing technical and local capacity development support, including locally based commission staff and funding.
- Providing statewide objectives for regional water security plan development, including compliance with interstate compacts and the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973.
- Identifying funding sources and supporting the acquisition of funds for implementation of approved regional water security plan.

The input received through the WSPA engagement process supports these provisions and the following are key considerations for the role that NMISC could play in supporting the implementation of regional water security plans:

- As outlined in the WSPA, the NMISC will serve in technical support role, acting as a resource for regional water planning entities to help identify resources for implementation.
- As outlined in the WSPA, the NMISC will provide staffing support for regional planning efforts.
- The NMISC could assist regions with accessing data and other critical information needed for decision-making and the prioritization of projects, programs, and policies.

Additional Observations

Other observations related to the procedures to support regional water plan implementation, based on review of engagement responses and process, include:

- The NMISC may consider providing support with planning entity formation and launching the planning process. This could include supporting engagement strategy development, such as helping to identify and connect with potential entity members, making certain that the planning entity is representative of key groups (see Rule 4 and Guideline 1), and defining engagement tactics to use in the planning process to ensure engagement of other groups, stakeholders, and the public.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations and observations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q12: How should different groups be involved in regional water planning and in what role?

Stakeholder groups were given a weighted score between 0 and 4 to represent the responses received for this question and summarize who and how different groups should be involved in the water planning process and water planning entity. A score of 4 indicated maximum involvement and a score of 0 indicated no involvement. State agencies (e.g., NMISC, NMOSE)

received a score of 3.2, indicating support for them being highly engaged in the planning process.

Q26: Which of the listed ways should the NMISC prioritize when supporting the implementation of regional water plans

Question 26 built on Question 25 to ask more specifically about the role of the NMISC in supporting the implementation of regional water plans. The most frequently selected response was for the NMISC to "Serve as a resource for regional water planning entities to help identify resources for implementation" (53%). There was also interest in the NMISC identifying statewide objectives and helping regional entities to meet them (35%) but less interest in NMISC providing ongoing support for 2 years during an official round of regional planning (12%).

Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?

A total of 157 respondents provided input on what they believe is most critical for the successful implementation of regional water plans, with responses categorized by theme. The most common theme (28%) emphasized the need for sufficient funding and resources to implement the plans, indicating support for the NMISC to serve as a connection to resources throughout implementation.

8: The schedule for implementation of regional water planning, including integration with statewide objectives

The schedule for implementing regional water planning, including integration with statewide objectives, will need to be updated to ensure plans remain aligned with both regional priorities and statewide water management goals.

Based on WSPA engagement feedback, and considering that the NMISC anticipates a 2-year planning cycle needed to create or update any regional water plan, key considerations for the implementation schedule for regional water plans include:

- Requiring technical updates to plans, focused on refreshing key data, metrics, implementation progress, and priority project lists should be prepared at routine intervals (e.g., every 5 years).
- Requiring comprehensive updates to the regional water plans should occur approximately every 10 years, to ensure that plans remain up-to-date and responsive to evolving needs.

Basis for Considerations

These considerations are based on the review of responses and themes to the following engagement questions.

Q27: How frequently should future regional water planning entities be required to update their regional water security plans? Note, NMISC anticipates a two-year planning cycle needed to update any regional water security plan.

The majority of respondents (78%) indicated a preference for regional water plan updates to occur every five years. Additionally, a smaller portion of respondents favored a 10-year update cycle. Very few respondents (1%) supported a longer planning timeframe of 15 years, while 7% felt that no specific timeframe should be required. These responses suggest strong support for a regular update schedule, with five years emerging as the preferred timeframe for maintaining flexibility and responsiveness in regional water planning efforts.

Q30: What do you think is most needed to ensure that regional water plans can be successfully implemented?

For this question, 12% of responses highlighted the need for tracking, monitoring, and analysis to ensure success, indicating that regular technical updates to the regional water plans will be important.